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SUBJECT: Sao Paulo Consultations Related to the Joint Action Plan to Eliminate Racism (JAPER)

REF:

[¶1.](#) Summary: USG officials held consultations in Sao Paulo with members of civil society on September 10 at Unipalmare, Brazil's first and only university tailored to the needs of Afro-Brazilians. The consultation followed technical meetings for the U.S.-Brazil Joint Action Plan to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Discrimination and Promote Equality (JAPER) held in Brasilia (septel). Representatives from the Afro-Brazilian community said their chief challenge was the "invisibility" of both their group and its concerns about racism. Brazil sees itself as a multi-racial democracy, even though problems such as exclusion from the job market, negative and stereotyped media portrayals, and systematic educational inequality remain serious problems for Afro-Brazilians. Participants embraced the idea of the JAPER. Afro-Brazilians are aware of racial challenges in U.S., but are also impressed with what they see as the United States' greater honesty in addressing race issues. Unipalmare's founder and Rector, Jose Vicente, summed up the meeting by noting that "five year's ago this discussion could never have taken place," since neither Unipalmare nor the JAPER even existed. End Summary.

U.S. Reps Consult on JAPER

[¶2.](#) The first civil society consultation related to the U.S.-Brazil Joint Action Plan to Eliminate Racism (JAPER) took place on September 10 at Unipalmare (the Zumbi dos Palmares University, Brazil's first and only university tailored to the needs of Afro-Brazilians). U.S. representatives met with Brazilian academics as well as representatives of both civil society and the private sector to learn about racial discrimination issues in Brazil, ask for views regarding potential areas of focus for the Action Plan, and to begin a dialogue regarding measures to gauge success. Among the U.S. representatives were: Inter-American Foundation (IAF) President Ambassador Larry Palmer, IAF staffer Judith Morrison, BSC Director Milton Drucker, WHA/PDA desk officer Blakeney Vasquez and WHA Brazil desk officer Ben Chiang. USG participants were joined during part of the day-long session by WHA PDAS Ambassador Craig Kelly and Under Secretary Giovanni Harvey of Brazil's Secretariat to Promote Racial Equality (SEPPIR). Various members of the Brazilian academic community and Afro-Brazilian communities also took part, including Unipalmare Rector Jose Vicente. Private sector banks that both support Unipalmare and that engage in affirmative action also sent representatives.

[¶3.](#) U.S. representatives Milton Drucker and Ambassador Larry Palmer led off the meeting by presenting the overall concept of the U.S.-Brazil JAPER. Drucker was careful to explain that the U.S. representatives had come to listen and exchange ideas as to how both societies could learn from each other in the fight against racism, racial discrimination and social exclusion. Ambassador Palmer asked

the audience to describe the problems Afro-Brazilians face and to determine yardsticks for the success of the JAPER.

Defining the Dimensions of the Problem

¶4. The Brazilian audience, composed mostly of academics and representatives from Afro-Brazilian NGOs, responded enthusiastically. Among the key points made were:

-Afro-Brazilian "Invisibility." The myth of "multi-racial democracy" in Brazil has suppressed a real discussion of continuing problems of exclusion and racism for Afro-Brazilians. As a result, it is difficult for Afro-Brazilians to put burning issues - inequality, exclusion, continued underrepresentation in government, poor and even distorted representation in the media - on the government's and on society's agenda as a priority problem to be addressed.

-The Law Doesn't Apply. Even when the GOB has taken legislative action, mandating a greater presence for Afro-Brazilians in the media, requiring the teaching of Afro-Brazilian history in school, and pushing affirmative action type programs, these statutes are often not applied. Seven years after an educational mandate to teach Afro-Brazilian history, the subject is still not in the curriculum of many public schools, for example.

-The Media Images Do Damage. Afro-Brazilians are either barely portrayed in the media (in violation of laws requiring greater Afro-Brazilian representation in public advertising) or are portrayed poorly, in terms of negative stereotypes. As well, Afro-Brazilians are underrepresented among journalists and media creators. Even official government publications do not present

SAO PAULO 00000499 002 OF 003

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Afro-Brazilians in proportion to their real numbers in Brazilian society (around half the population).

-Education is Required, But Fails. Participants emphasized that education would be critical to Afro-Brazilian success. Nonetheless, Afro-Brazilians overwhelmingly depend on Brazil's underfunded and problematic public school system for primary and secondary instruction. And even within that system, inequality abounds. Teachers treat Afro-Brazilian students differently, sometimes refusing to hug a student, allegedly for fear of getting lice. Teachers refuse to teach Afro-Brazilian history because they argue that it would be divisive to do so, despite laws requiring such classes. Afro-Brazilian parents are so accustomed to discrimination that they often do not complain even when their children suffer from blatantly unequal treatment. Students at Unipalmares University, often face high levels of stress, since they are frequently pioneers in higher education from their families and so they feel they cannot fail.

Actions and Measures Going Forward

¶15. The group then discussed the goals for the JAPR initiative as well as ways to measure its success. Among the points made were:

- "Affirmative Action Has to Become Vertically Integrated." It is not enough for a university or business to admit/hire a few Afro-Brazilians. Real opportunity paths have to be created that lead to leadership positions, if change is to occur. Unipalmares faculty noted that, for the school's graduates, "a college degree is not enough." There has to be follow-up with jobs so that Afro-Brazilians can gain real footholds in institutions and businesses (like the major media) where they are now woefully underrepresented.

-More Research Needed. Right now, there are too few studies of Afro-Brazilians and the barriers they face. One participant, a trained nurse and public health educator who works at Unipalmares, described how Brazil's myth of multi-racial democracy suppresses research. Several years ago, when she suggested doing a study of Afro-Brazilian health issues, she was told that such a project would be divisive, unnecessary and even racist.

--English Studies. Getting more Afro-Brazilians into English-immersion programs was identified by the vast majority of participants in as a key goal and potential measure of the JAPR's effectiveness. English has become a critical tool in the Brazilian labor market, and it is a natural area where the U.S. can contribute.

--More Media Presence. Participants agreed that it would be good to sponsor a conference on Afro-Brazilians and the media to discuss both Afro-Brazilian media images and Afro-Brazilian presence among the ranks of journalists.

Private Sector Participation

¶6. Representatives from one of Brazil's biggest banks, Bradesco, and from Citibank described the efforts their institutions have undertaken to provide more opportunities for Afro Brazilians. Bradesco's representative talked about the bank's long history of inclusion, beginning with the employment of Japanese Brazilians during the 1940s. Both banks have recruitment and internship

SAO PAULO 00000499 003 OF 003

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programs and support Unipalmares University. The representatives stressed that, for the business sector, diversity is not only a moral imperative, but also a source of value-added, as more businesses become aware of the need to reach out to Afro-Brazilian consumers. (Note: Brazil's Minister for Racial Integration, Edson Santos, has told us that the banking sector has been one of the most willing to engage in affirmative action programs. According to banking representatives, the fact that Unipalmares works closely with them to ensure that its educational program provides the skills needed by the banks is an important factor in the success of their affirmative action programs, a factor that is missing from even the largest universities in Brazil. End note.)

Comment: Afro-Brazilians Respond/Unipalmares a Natural Ally

¶17. The meeting at Unipalmares clearly struck a strong and responsive chord among Afro-Brazilian participants. Despite its faults, the United States looms large in the Afro-Brazilians'

consciousness as a country that - according to the sentiments expressed at this meeting - has dealt more openly with issues of racism and inclusion than their own. Civil Society representatives appreciated the eagerness of USG participants to listen. The nature of many of the programs suggested, including more exchanges and greater English language immersion, suggested a pragmatic orientation on the part of the Brazilian participants.

¶18. Unipalmares itself was a fitting site for this first discussion.

The institution does not yet rank with the most elite Brazilian universities. Nonetheless, its faculty and supporters are suffused with a sense of mission in bringing access to higher education to more Afro-Brazilians. Consequently, the symbolism, and sense of progress, that the JAPER discussions created was quite powerful. As Unipalmares' Rector remarked, "Five years ago, we could not have had this discussion." At that time, neither the university nor the JAPR existed. We are off to a good start.

¶19. This cable was coordinated/cleared by Embassy Brasilia.

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